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Special Wish selectee attends Albuquerque Balloon Festival

by Rich Garcia, Directed Energy Directorate

ALBUQUERQUE, N.M. — Suffering from a disabling and potentially fatal genetic disorder, the 8-year-old daughter of a United States Air Force employee from Wright-Patterson Air Force Base, Ohio, is attending the Albuquerque Balloon Fiesta the weekend of October 6 under the auspices of A Special Wish Foundation.

Jenna Minges, born with a rare genetic disorder called 10-Quarter Deletion Syndrome that has led to severe heart defects, told the Columbus, Ohio-based foundation that her fondest desire was to attend an event that featured hot-air balloons. The Albuquerque fiesta was chosen because it is the largest of its kind in the world.

Jenna's father, Mark, works for the Air Force Research Laboratory's Information Directorate. One of the laboratory's sister units, the Directed Energy Directorate at Kirtland Air Force Base, N.M., and Kirtland's Airborne Laser System Program Office helped host Jenna and her family while in the area. Jenna also viewed the launching of the Airborne Laser's own hot-air balloon.

While at the Balloon Fiesta, Jenna attended several events, including the fiesta's opening day Mass Ascension where more than 700 balloons were launched. She was also honored by Top Flight, an ensemble from the Air Force Band of the West at Lackland Air Force Base, Texas, who recognized Jenna on stage and dedicated a selection to her. As an honorary cadet with the Balloon Fiesta Academy, she joined 16 other visiting cadets from throughout the United States to make and fly small paper hot-air balloons.

In addition to attending the weeklong balloon fiesta, Jenna and her family toured several southwest sites and are scheduled to view the firing of a 15,000-watt research laser at the laboratory's Directed Energy Directorate.



"SPECIAL WISH" COME TRUE — Tech. Sgt. Sara Deluzio, right, a vocalist with the Air Force band at Lackland AFB, Texas, sings a song to Jenna Minges, an 8-year-old suffering from a disabling and potential fatal genetic disorder. (Air Force photo)

The 10-Quarter Deletion Syndrome, named because victims have an abnormal 200-plus genes on the Q leg of chromosome Number 10, manifests itself in a number of heart defects. Jenna did not walk until she was 3 and, at 38 pounds, physically resembles a child at age 4 or 5. Her long-term fate is undetermined but medical articles indicate that individuals with the disease often do not live beyond their 12th birthday.

The A Special Wish Foundation, with 81 chapters in the United States and 22 others abroad, grants the wishes of children with life-threatening illnesses in an attempt to enrich their lives. @